BOYHOOD REMEMBRANCES OF LIFE AMONG THE DAKOTAS AND THE MASSACRE IN 1862.*

BY JOHN AMES HUMPHREY.

My father, Dr. Philander P. Humphrey, was born in Torringford, Connecticut, on the 26th day of February, 1823. My mother, Susan Angier Ames, was born July 8th, 1829, and was the only daughter of Horatio Ames, who carried on a large iron manufacturing business in Falls Village, Connecticut. She was a granddaughter of Oliver Ames of North Easton, Massachusetts, who founded the celebrated shovel manufacturing business located in that town for many years, and which is still carried on by the Ames family.

I was born in Falls Village, June 15th, 1850, and about two years later my parents brought me with them to Minnesota. They eventually settled at Kasota, near which then promising village my father pre-empted a good farm of 160 acres. In 1857 he was a member of the Council in the Minnesota Territorial Legislature. My brother, Jay Phelps, eight years younger than myself, was born in Kasota.

Subsequently my parents determined, inasmuch as the growth of Kasota had not fulfilled anticipations, to move to St. Peter, which then seemed certain soon to be made the state capital and to become a large city. A comfortable house was built therefore in St. Peter (only the ground floor was actually finished inside); and I well remember the day when it dawned upon my childish mind what a struggle my parents had made to clear the home from debt before they moved into it. Watches, chains, and about everything they possessed of merchantable value, had been sold to make payment for the house in full. At that period actual money was scarce and difficult to obtain, while land could scarcely be realized upon. How my parents managed in those days to secure food sufficient for healthful existence, is a problem which I have never been quite

*Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, March 14, 1910.

able to solve. Certainly existence is the right word for expressing what we went through. Gertrude, the youngest child of my parents, a sweet baby very much like mother, was born in St. Peter.

My father was educated at Oberlin College, and became by profession a homoeopathic physician. Homoeopathy was not the fashion then, and for that reason the money returns from his practice were not what they should have been. As a mere boy, much too young to understand the reason why, I remember harboring almost murderous feelings toward Dr. Catlin, who practiced allopathy and appeared to be always on the go. He kept two horses; my father kept one. But for Dr. Catlin's son, about my own age and a schoolmate at the local district school, my affection was unbounded, and we were fast friends. It may be added, however, that it seemed that the harder a doctor worked the poorer he became, for people really had not money to pay even modest bills.

In 1860, through the split in the Democratic party and its putting two candidates in the field for president of the United States, the election by the Republicans of Abraham Lincoln for that office was accomplished. It followed that Democratic government officers were turned out of their comfortable berths (which they had by long years holding become accustomed to look upon as theirs by right), and Republicans were appointed in their places. My father by this time had acquired real estate of prospective value, but was without what may be termed working capital. He therefore applied for the position of government physician at the Lower Sioux Agency, twelve miles above Fort Ridgely, on the south bank of the Minnesota river. This he obtained in due course, and thereby became the recipient of the munificent salary of $1,000 per annum, with a comfortable house to live in, besides some very small perquisites. For example, he was the postmaster, and in that way increased his income by a few dollars. He removed his family in 1861 from St. Peter to the Lower Sioux Agency. There we lived in comparative peace and comfort for a little more than a year.

Social life, one might say, there was none. My father, unfortunately for himself, was not a sportsman; he had no taste

for fishing, shooting, boating, cards, or horses; he even could not swim. He took an exceptional interest in politics, and held such pronounced abolitionist views regarding African slavery, when these views were decidedly unpopular even in the Republican party, that, although a member of the Congregational church, he ceased to affiliate with any religious organization, because they would not take action on this burning question. He was, however, a religious man to the point that by precept and example he condemned the sale of, and indulgence in, alcoholic liquor of all kinds, and also of tobacco. He defended earnestly Christian doctrine in argument with German and other infidels and agnostics of his time. His moral tone was elevated, and his example was helpful in the community.

He had a hasty temper, and I, his eldest son, suffered the most from it, especially during those months at the Lower Sioux Agency, probably owing to the fact that there was no suitable school for white children, so that I was obliged to study at home and recite lessons to my parents, etc. Parents often know more about bringing up children when their firstborn arrives, than after they have tried to bring up a number. It is a dreadful thing to be the firstborn of the family. Perfection is expected from them.

My mother, by temperament, accomplishments, and the possession of exceptional personal beauty, was qualified to grace any position in society. Instead, however, of seeking by marriage the position in life which reasonable ambition would seem naturally to prompt, she chose for her husband the man she loved, poor in this world's goods, but rich in high principle and sound education. She entrusted to him her future happiness, and hoped to assist him to secure an independence for them both. Her father, rich at that time, practically disinherited her for doing so. She become a loyal self-sacrificing wife and mother, and spent her too short life solely for husband and children.

The atheist, the agnostic, or the nominal Christian, can give no reasonable explanation for the fate that befell this Christian woman, and indeed the entire family, excepting one; and it would be equally impossible for such persons to give any sufficient reason why the eldest boy escaped with his life.

My father read his books and newspapers; discussed politics, religion, and philosophy, that is, when anybody came along to argue with him; listened to my recitations; and prescribed for and gave medicine to the Indians, and visited them in illness when called upon. It was true, however, of the Indians that when they were seriously ill, that is, near death's door, they chose the incantations and doses of their own medicine men.

I went to some of their "medicine dances" (so called), where I suppose their most sacred rites were practiced; and it was a pitiful sight to see those dying from consumption and other ailments brought and placed in a certain location, set apart, supposed to be consecrated and thereby made efficacious. Unwittingly upon one occasion I stumbled into this enclosure, and I believe that only my youth saved me from instant death. I was very roughly handled, and the expressions on the faces of the Indians, together with the deathlike stillness that fell upon the scene, unmistakably told me that I was in great danger. I visited their villages fearlessly, picked up much of their language, was invariably treated kindly by them, and they called me the "little medicine man." I can pronounce the equivalent words in the Sioux language, but cannot write them properly.

My mother was fully occupied with household duties and care of the children. She even had to make my suits of clothes. A servant was quite out of the question in that wilderness, even if one could have been afforded. I had to be nurse for my little brother and sister, and am sorry to say that I sometimes rebelled. This was because after I had studied lessons and recited them, sawed and split all the firewood (no coal in those days), looked up the cows (there were no fences), milked them, taken care of the horses, carried all the water, built the fires, etc., I felt somehow entitled to a little play. But I seldom got it.

Sundays I often attended services at the Episcopal mission close by. Rev. Mr. Hinman, the clergyman in charge, conducted the service with the help of his housekeeper who made all the responses. Mr. Hinman was married, but his wife was an invalid and could give him little assistance. He was a protégé of Bishop Whipple, who took great interest in the enter-

prise and visited it. The many years of patient, self-sacrificing labors of other missionaries, like Dr. Riggs and Dr. Williamson and their families, were rewarded with better results. They gathered together a few genuine converts, who stood the test when the days of trial came. But these missionaries were overzealous in defense of the Indians subsequent to the awful massacre of 1862.

As a race, I maintain that the Sioux Indians are cruel, crafty, and treacherous, and utterly wanting in sense of gratitude for favors rendered to them. They would beg for and accept help from white people, and would sneak back later, not only to murder but to torture the generous donors and their helpless women and children. It is idle to attempt to prove that they were not responsible for their dreadful deeds. They were quite intelligent enough to discriminate between white men who had misused them and helpless women and children, who were physically and morally incapable of doing so. The simple fact that their defenders were willing to trust their own lives, and the lives of those dearest to them, in their power, is quite good enough proof for me that in their opinion the Sioux Indian was responsible for his acts. Granting that he had been badly treated by some palefaces, he knew that he was not justified in committing murder, and especially in outraging and torturing them as well.

If the red Indian is a human being capable of understanding the teaching of Christian missionaries, he must possess a soul and the power of choosing good or evil. There has been implanted in him belief in the existence of "the Great Spirit," desire to worship him, and sense of dependence upon and accountability to him. I quite believe that the Sioux Indians of the period we are writing about knew beyond question that killing human beings was looked upon by the Great Spirit as the equivalent of what the word murder expresses to white men.

I knew the notorious Little Crow. He had the face of a fanatic, the voice of a hypocrite (its quality was insincere), and the bearing of a leader, but he did not impress one as being the possessor of sound judgment. He was a dreamer and a schemer. He overestimated his own ability and misled his people. He had been given exceptional opportunities for acquir-

ing some adequate estimate of the relative strength of the Indians and the whites, but he utterly failed. He gave his people oratory, but could not give them wisdom. Neither was he any braver than the average of his race. He would not stand up to an open fight, even when the chances were tremendously in his favor. He ought to have easily captured Fort Ridgely, with its decimated garrison and filled with refugees; but his tactics of dodging behind trees and crawling in the grass, instead of walking right in with the loss of a few of his braves, withheld from him the prize and the prestige. I was there, and am quite able to form an opinion.

There was freedom, and even grandeur, about my boyhood life at the Sioux Agency. It was perfectly natural and healthful; body and mind were sound. The atmosphere of unselfish mother love surrounded me at home; and when I walked, or rode abroad astride a noble horse, nature soothed and satisfied me. The God of my boyhood was exacting and despotic, and fear of the consequences of sin was always in my mind. How much more delightful would have been this life, if his infinite love and care for me had been taught me as well! My condition would then have been ideal. To know that punishment is remedial and not vindictive, think you it would have made any difference? O, the comfort of existence in this world in the conscious presence of a personal God of love! Such relationship was intended for the child, and for him when grown up, too.

At length, after a bright, restful Sabbath, the fateful Monday, the 18th of August, 1862, arrived. My mother was ill in bed, but had nearly recovered. I slept with my dear little brother in an upper room. In the small hours of that morning I could not sleep soundly; like a nightmare, apprehension of impending disaster settled down. Shake it off I could not, until in desperation I dressed and went downstairs. Talking about premonition, I quite understand what the word means. Apparently nobody else in the house was awake. I took the water pails, and, quietly leaving the house, went a short distance to a spring, with the intention of making journeys enough back and forth to fill the tubs for the weekly washing. The weight of my foreboding was so heavy upon me that I walked slowly and

lingered when I got to the spring, expecting every instant to see or hear something horrible. Leaving the spring and reaching the top of the hill, I saw Indians in parties of three or four hurrying into our small village from the direction of the encampment of Little Crow and other chiefs. These took up convenient points for observation at first. Soon I saw a teamster approach a wagon, with his pair of horses. Then one party of Indians ran to him and demanded them. He refused the request, when one of them emptied the contents of his gun into his abdomen. His suffering was so dreadful to witness that another Indian soon quieted him with the butt end of a gun. This was the beginning of the outbreak at the Lower Sioux Agency.

I immediately ran, as fast as my bare feet would carry me, to our house. By this time father had dressed and was in the surgery, and I said to him, "Father, something awful is going to happen." He replied, "Nonsense," and kept on with his work. I then begged him to step outside the house and look for himself. He would not move. I then told him what I had seen; not before would he move and show any interest. After a good look outside, without saying a word he walked into the house hurriedly and assisted mother to get up and dress. I meantime looked after the children, and then we all walked out by the back door, leaving everything behind. We started toward the ferry, with intention of crossing and making our way to Fort Ridgely. But father had been too slow. Those precious minutes through his blind sense of security cost the lives of himself, wife, and two of their three children.

When we reached the ferry, it was to find the ferryman gone and the then typical western flat-bottomed boat, which was propelled across the stream by means of a rope and pulleys, on the opposite bank. All the small canoes and row-boats were there as well. Hopelessness was depicted in father's face, for he could not swim; and he had threatened me with punishment such as I had never experienced (which was saying a great deal), if he ever found that I had "been in swimming." Occasionally when my guilty eyes had noticed a searching glance of his shot at me, I had felt that I wilted; but congratulate me, my hair was dry, and punishment was postponed. I had learned

to swim. There had been nobody to "give me away," for I always sneaked off alone; and I did nearly drown once, but the fascination was upon me and I persisted. I now boldly plunged into the river, swam to the other side, secured a small boat and rowed back to them, and we all crossed in silence. Looking back, I somehow feel that, after this exhibition of my skill, all should have been allowed to escape. Had we been only those few minutes earlier, all our lives would have been saved, for a number of our neighbors who were ahead of us at the ferry escaped to Fort Ridgely by wagon conveyance.

We were too late and therefore now plodded on foot along the main road toward the fort. The sun's rays soon beat down upon us with such power that they began to affect my mother, while the small children were unable to walk rapidly. When we had covered probably two and a half miles, we stopped, for by that time mother had become actually faint. We had no breakfast, not even a cup of tea before starting. We then discovered a path and at the end of it, only a few yards distant, a cabin, which we reached to find it vacant, as its occupants had fled. Until then we had neither seen nor heard Indians, and prospects for escaping seemed to brighten. My father took down a pail, and directed me to follow a footpath till I should find the spring and to return with water. I secured water, down in a ravine which proved to be well wooded, as was also the pathway leading to the spring.

Returning a little more than half the distance, I heard the crack of a rifle and listening presently heard the sound of voices, both from the direction of the cabin. I knew we had been overtaken, and debated whether or not I should complete the return and try to help. Quickly I decided that my presence would be useless. Then I deposited the full pail a few yards from the path, ran back to the spring, and from it ran along the ravine. There I was hidden from sight, and could make plans in comparative safety. I must have been alone an hour or two, when I decided that the Indians would not have waited longer in the expectation that I would return to the family. Then I decided to carefully seek the open road toward Fort Ridgely and below the cabin. In doing so I met the owner of the cabin, Magner by name, who, accompanied by another

man, was sheltering as I had been. I joined them, and before long we venteured to the main road.

Looking down the road, we discovered men coming toward us, who proved to be Captain Marsh with about fifty soldiers, hastening to the Agency to quell the disturbance there, which had been reported early in the forenoon by the first refugees who had fled to the fort. Magner and his companion imparted to Captain Marsh what information they had, and we all joined the expedition.

This to me was a return journey, but I knew it was the safest way to get a look at that cabin and learn the fate of our family. To go there was the matter of only a few minutes. The little force halted when the footpath was reached, and, with Magner and a few soldiers detailed for the purpose, I approached the spot where the building had been. The murderers had set fire to it, and the smouldering ruins which had fallen into the cellar contained the mortal remains of my mother and brother and sister. That was the first suggestion, as we all stood there, and subsequent investigation (made a few days later) proved that it was correct. My father's body lay a few feet away. A bullet had pierced the center of his forehead, and the fiends had cut his throat. His axe, a poor weapon for such conditions but the only one he possessed, lay near him, showing that he went outside the cabin and met them like a brave man. How long I stood there, I do not know; the shock was so great that I became momentarily insensible to material surroundings and saw only in spirit the scene of death,—truly I was alone with my dead.

When I came to my normal self, every living person had vanished, and I ran fast up the road to overtake the soldiers. This had been their first introduction into the land of desolation, which was extending rapidly. Soon the road descended along the valley bluff which follows the north side of the Minnesota river. The sight of dead men, women, and children, now became frequent all the way to the ferry which we had crossed a few hours before. The effect was depressing, and the few words spoken were in undertone. Those poor souls fleeing for their lives had been shot down from the cover of underbrush and tall coarse grass which grow rankly in these western river valleys.

The ferry boat had been left temptingly on the north side of the river, and Indians were in plain sight on the opposite side, on the bluff which rises abruptly to the Agency. A parley took place, through interpreter Quinn, between Captain Marsh and the Indian leader. It is now apparent that the object of the Indians was to induce Captain Marsh to send his force across, and when the boat was in midstream to pick his men off from both banks. Probably not a man would have escaped, and, had the Indians who were hidden in the tall grass on the side where we were not been too impulsive, I believe that their plan would have succeeded. There was not a suspicion that we were surrounded by them until they rose suddenly and poured their fire across into us. More than half of our men fell, and it seems a miracle that a single man escaped. But the grass that had hidden them hid us, and those who lived were led by Providence out of the ambuscade to a point not far down the river. Captain Marsh was unhurt and escaped with a small party of survivors. During the firing I had sat in an army wagon on top of a barrel of provisions. When I saw the immediate effect of the fire from the Indians and realized the position, I joined the survivors and made it a point to keep about in the middle of them so that I should not fail to keep up. Several soldiers did become separated from us in the confusion and excitement.

Captain Marsh insisted upon crossing the river at the point just mentioned, in opposition to the judgment of his men. He was in command, however, and would have had his way had he not entered the water first, considerably in advance of his men, and drowned in midstream in sight of all. He could not swim, and help did not reach him.

How it came about I do not know, but the party I was with had now dwindled to perhaps ten or twelve men. We kept on down the river, still on the north side, and about dark filed up onto the bluff into the Fort Ridgely road. I think Magner was with us. The poor fellows were tired, and having, as it seemed to them, escaped from the jaws of certain death, became a bit demoralized and relaxed their vigilance. Two of them dropped their muskets, and were going on without them; I picked them up, and was trudging along, having a strong feeling within me

that they might be wanted, when they took them from me without saying a word. We reached the fort about midnight, and then ended a long and eventful day.

I stayed during the siege, but will not give my experience of it, as many others have written faithful and graphic accounts. Final relief came when General Sibley arrived with men and a long line of wagons loaded with provisions for the besieged. This was a happy day for everybody. The wagons were soon unloaded and filled up again with several hundred refugees, who, in care of Mr. B. W. Smith, of St. Paul, with a very small escort, started on the afternoon of the same day on the return journey to St. Peter. I climbed in somewhere, and reached St. Peter in due course unharmed. I went to the home of Governor Swift, who lived across the street from my father's house, where I was kindly received. While there I struggled hard with soap and water to get rid of some of the outside dirt, but it was grimed in too deep to come off with one operation.

Leaving St. Peter, I walked to Traverse des Sioux and stopped a night with the McIntyres, who were old friends of our family. The following morning one of them walked with me to a spot where the stage coach for Shakopee passed, gave me $1.50, and with his blessing boosted me up to the front seat with the driver, at the same time telling him briefly who I was and something of my recent experience. A boy soon gains the good will of a man who lives with horses, and we got on together famously all day.

When we came to the point where fares were collected, matters were put right for me by the stage driver and payment was not pressed. But when we stopped at the hotel at noon for lunch and I had partaken heartily along with the other passengers, I was stopped on the way out and payment was demanded. Having only $1.50 and a long journey before me, I was economical of the truth and told the collector that I could not pay him. When he had about exhausted his vocabulary of profanity, he asked my name. This I was willing enough to give him, and a gentleman who had been listening to the one-sided argument ordered him to allow me to pass, stating that he knew my father well, etc. I never learned the name of this

kind man, but I was glad to get up on the coach again with my capital still intact.

We reached Shakopee about sunset and drove to a hotel, where all alighted and passengers for St. Paul were obliged to stop for the night, as the steamboat to complete the journey did not leave until the following morning. I walked to the hotel counter, and when my turn came was asked what I wanted. "A bedroom," I replied. Again I was in trouble; I wonder that the man stopped to ask my name, when my style of dress is considered, and that I did not carry even a small parcel. But he did, and God had sent another gentleman to stand there at that special time to hear it, and to explain that my father was a personal friend and business customer of his. His name was Mr. Howe, and his firm supplied my father with drugs. So I was made comfortable, and when I left that hotel in the morning the $1.50 still traveled with me. But I parted with some of it for steamboat fare, for I knew that when I reached William L. Ames, my uncle, in St. Paul, I should be looked after and not need it.

You shall now hear what I wore when I presented myself at my uncle's in St. Paul: a man's black soft hat (expecting to swim the river, I had left my own hat and coat at the river bank where Captain Marsh was drowned, and had replaced both at the fort); a man's linen duster, which nearly swept the ground; trousers (worse for wear, of course); a very dirty shirt; and a flannel band which my mother had fastened around my neck for sore throat a day or two before the massacre. I had one brace to hold up my trousers, possibly two; but I certainly had no other clothing nor luggage on that day when I entered the confines of civilization.

14

RETURN TO ⟶ CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
202 Main Library

LOAN PERIOD 1 HOME USE	2	3
4	5	6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405
1-year loans may be recharged by bringing the books to the Circulation Desk
Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

REC. CIR. OCT 16 1985
OCT 24 1992
AUTO DISC CIRC APR 22 '93
SEP 20 1987
AUTO. DISC
AUTO DISC CIRC DEC 18 '92
RECEIVED
OCT 22 19
APR 29 1996
LIBRARY USE ONLY
MAR 23 1993
CIRCULATION DEPT.
LIBRARY USE ONLY
CIRCULATION DEPT.
MAR 2 8 1988
DISC CIRC MAR 23 '93
APR 28 2006
CIRCULATION DEPT.
JUN 18 2007
RECEIVED
LIBRARY USE ONLY
MAR 29 988
APR 22 1993
CIRCULATION DEPT.
CIRCULATION DEPT.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
FORM NO. DD6, 60m, 1/83 BERKELEY, CA 94720

RETURN TO the circulation desk of any
University of California Library

or to the

NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station
University of California
Richmond, CA 94804-4698

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

- 2-month loans may be renewed by calling (510) 642-6753
- 1-year loans may be recharged by bringing books to NRLF
- Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

JAN 16 2004

APR 05 2007

APR 08 2007

JUN 18 2007

DD20 15M 4-02